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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: OMAN SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT OBAMA

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¶1. SUMMARY: In response to Reftel, Post has reviewed local coverage of the new administration, especially in light of the President's January 26 Al-Arabia interview. Since the inauguration and culminating most recently in the interview, Omani media has been seized with what has been hailed as a possible new beginning. As usual, dailies in Arabic and English have relied on wire-service/agency reporting (primarily AFP), but have given substantial space and prime locations for news out of Washington, with Government Arabic daily "Oman" in the lead. Numerous editorials and columns themed have trended toward cautious optimism, while routinely calling for attention, respect, and a return to justice for the Middle East. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Government Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) has given top billing in Oman's Arabic press to reporting on the new President and his administration, with five front page stories since January 20, as opposed to two by private daily "Al Watan" (circulation 42,000) through January 31. "Oman"'s January 21 headline read "Obama Fever Sweeps Washington", followed shortly by "Obama Ordered Closure of U.S. Prisons" on January 23 and "Obama's Priority: Arab European Dialogue to Create Context for Middle East Peace". Private dailies have taken a more reserved tack. "Al Watan" lead on January 21 with the muted "Obama's Inauguration as President of the U.S." followed by only one other headline which ordered the closure of Guantanamo.

¶3. Editorial themes have ranged from strongly positive to outright skepticism. Government daily "Oman" opined on "Promising Hopes for Peace" on January 22, then commented in subsequent columns that "the new administration is not guilty" (Jan 22), calling Obama's actions on Guantanamo "commendable" (Jan 24) and possibly the "start of a new era" (Jan 27). Private daily "Al Watan", though, was more cautious. "American policy is unchangeable" it said on Jan 21 in a lead column headed "The World is Waiting". Later columns did note a "spirit of reconciliation and mutual interests" (Jan 22), but also asked "Will Obama fulfill his promise of withdrawing from Iraq?" (Jan 25) and then lamented "Perhaps Obama's approach to the Middle East is no different from his predecessors" (Jan 30).

¶4. Youth-oriented Arabic daily "Al Shabiba" (circulation 20,000) praised the President on January 29 for moving quickly to address regional audiences. The paper followed up on February 2 with an editorial, "Obama's Calling - Are You Listening?", that chided the Arab world for its ongoing divisions and concluded: "Arabs! This is the right time to set your agenda, be clear, and let the American President hear your voice. Now the question is: when are you going to do this?"

¶5. Notably, Oman's private English weekly "The Week" (the Sultanate's largest circulation periodical at more than 52,000 copies) on February 3 published a double-page spread featuring a New York Times op-ed by John Yoo hailing the closure of Guantanamo Bay under the banner headline "Obama's Choice". The appearance of news/editorial content in what is essentially a light features magazine is a strong indication of local interest in political developments in the U.S.

¶6. COMMENT: Oman's coverage of the U.S. visibly and positively shifted since January 20. The comparative reserve seen among private papers puts the state press in the lead on American topics and creates what is for Omani readers a somewhat unusual diversity of perspective. Oman's media is acknowledging and praising the good will generated by the President's first two weeks, but a hesitant tone lingers among skeptics. END COMMENT.
GRAPPO

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL [http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSSSearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:8 2711830-1fac-481a-b43b-61b623103a62](http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSSSearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:8%202711830-1fac-481a-b43b-61b623103a62)